**DOCUMENT RESUME**

ED 169 818 HE 011 179

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| AUTHOR | Shanker, Albert |
| TITLE | Unions and the Academic Enterprise. |
| INSTITUTION | American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C. |
| PUB DATE | [78] |
| NOTE | 14p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | American Federation of Teachers, 11 Dupont Circle, N.W., Washington, DC 20036 (Item no. 623. single copy $0.25, $15.00 for 100) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Academic Freedom; Affirmative Action; *Collective Bargaining; *College Faculty; Decision Making; Employment Opportunities; *Faculty Organizations; *Governance; Higher Education; Power Structure; Productivity; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Role; Teacher Salaries; Teaching Benefits; Tenure; *Unions |
| IDENTIFIERS | *American Federation of Teachers; *Faculty College Relationship |

ABSTRACT

Excerpts from magazine and newspaper interviews with the president of the American Federation of Teachers concerning unions and collective bargaining at colleges and universities are presented. Topics concern: professionalism and economic self-interest, unions and freedom of inquiry, merit pay, academic elitism, the political influence of college teachers, faculty participation in governance, defining university management, the shrinking academic job market, tenure under attack, productivity in education, unions and affirmative action, and the role of college members in the American Federation of Teachers. It is shown that collective bargaining has dealt with economic conditions and due process procedures and does not conflict with professionalism. Collective bargaining and a union protect academic freedom and promote fairness in faculty salaries rather than relying on subjective decisions. Faculty members could be a potent political force in higher education, which depends on the tax structure and on public policy. For the most part, faculty senates have not had power in college governance, but they could continue to coexist with unions. The need to guarantee job stability for senior faculty and to provide educational programs for nontraditional students is addressed. Disagreement with efforts to promote productivity in higher education is expressed. (SW)

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# UNIONS AND THE ACADEMIC ENTERPRISE

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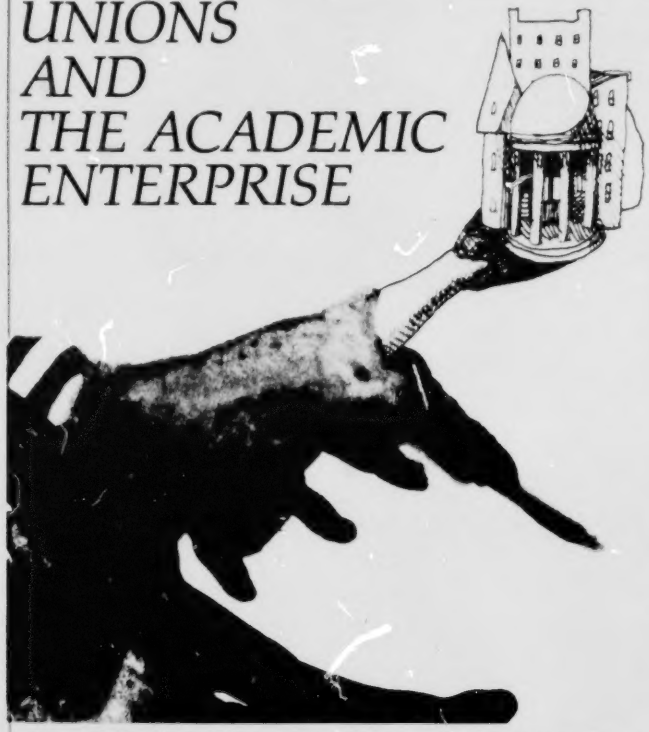
*Illustrated by Susan Davis. Designed by Andrew Bornstein.*

# *UNIONS AND THE ACADEMIC ENTERPRISE*



**COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS BY ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO**

The notion that unions could somehow be appropriate in an academic setting is still not readily entertained by a large number of American college teachers. In the excerpts from magazine and newspaper interviews which follow, Albert Shanker addresses some of the most frequently voiced concerns of faculties regarding unions and collective bargaining.



## ON PROFESSIONALISM AND ECONOMIC SELF-INTEREST

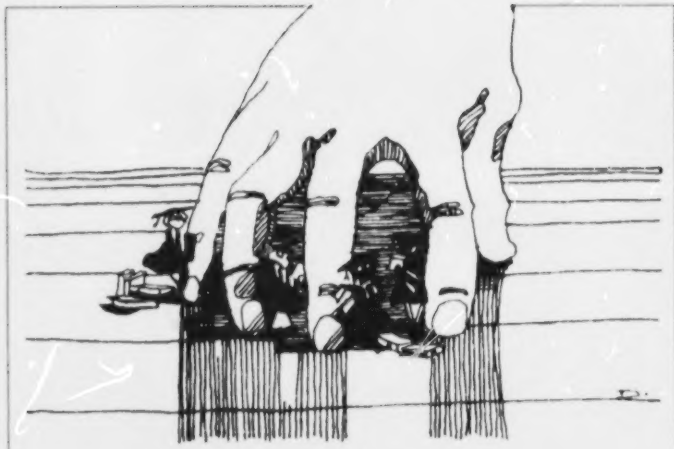
"No one says a doctor who earns $100,000 a year is not interested in his clients. In fact, most of us would hesitate to go to a doctor who earns a teacher's salary because we'd think there was something wrong with him.

"Actually, a professional is an expert, a person who has such competence in a given area that he or she is relatively self-directed. The surgeon doesn't have the hospital administrator standing over him saying 'cut a little to the left' or 'cut a little to the right.'

"We in education have been very much like workers in an educational factory until recently: told exactly what to do. Our ability to make decisions has been very limited. The coming of unionization and collective bargaining has meant that teachers who were not able and willing to stand up to irrational authority by themselves are now willing and able to do it collectively.

"We have to look at precisely what the subjects of bargaining have been. Generally, these are economic conditions. They deal with questions of salaries, with pensions, with some questions of workload, with holidays, with vacations and with due process procedures in the event that charges are brought. Now this whole process has nothing to do with whether Professor X specializes in the works of Immanuel Kant or whether someone else goes into the Pre-Socratics.

"I see no incompatibility between professionalism and unionism or between professionalism and economic self-interest. In fact, some groups of highly-trained professionals have been organized in unions for years. Among these groups are actors and actresses, musicians and television people, engineers and airline pilots. The unions negotiate salaries, fringes and job security provisions for these people, whereas their work remains a matter of individual competence and there is no interference with that."



## ON UNIONS AND FREEDOM OF INQUIRY

"Can anyone come forward and show that in those institutions which have been unionized, academic freedom has suffered? I doubt it very much. Unless the faculty has the collective strength to enforce its decisions on academic freedom, then all they are left with are committee reports.

"Freedom in this country is not based on some general philosophical notion. It is based on the fact that we have courts and constitutional guarantees, which in a sense comprise a kind of social 'contract.' Unless you have something similar on campus, you don't really have very much. So I would say that you need collective bargaining and a union to protect academic freedom.

"I think that if you want to prevent time clocks and regimentation, you have to be organized to prevent it. You need that organization and you can't get it without a union. You will be absolutely defenseless if the administration were to start to do certain things."

**"Unless the faculty has the collective strength to enforce its decisions on academic freedom, then all they are left with are committee reports."**

## ON MERIT PAY

"It depends upon how the teachers in each institution accept the fairness or unfairness of the structure that exists. If the disparities in income are viewed as being the result of highly subjective decisions, if they are viewed as being a system of arbitrary rewards and punishments, then there is no question that the faculty will vote to walk in with demands which will bring about greater equalization.

**"It depends upon how the teachers in each institution accept the fairness or unfairness of the structure that exists."**

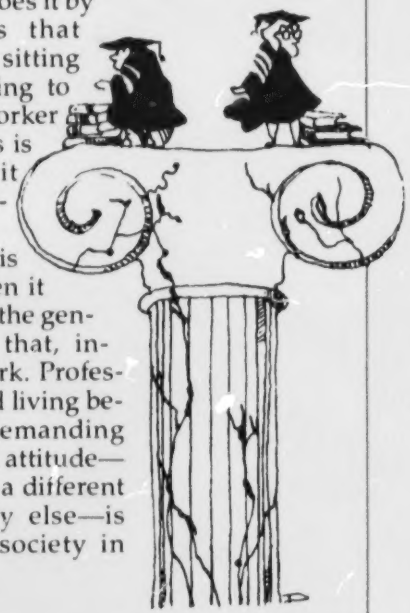
"On the other hand, where the rewards are viewed as fair to the extent that there is a common perception that Professor So-and-so is the outstanding person in the world on this subject and we are fortunate to have him at this institution and if he weren't here we wouldn't have the reputation that we have to attract the best students, then teachers accept merit as one of the bases of reward."

## ON ACADEMIC ELITISM

"I think we have to distinguish among the many meanings of the word 'elitism.' Obviously we want those who teach in our colleges and universities to know more about what they're doing than those who are coming to learn.

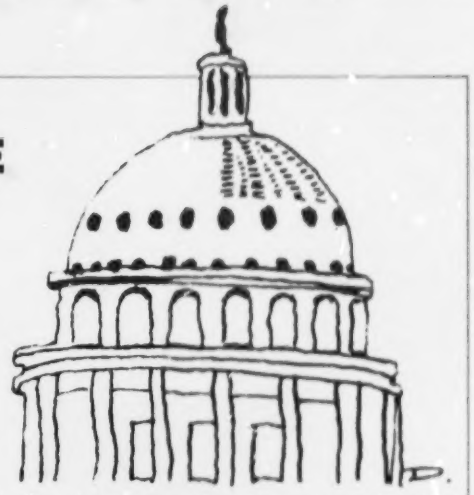
"Now the public in this country supports institutions of higher learning, not only the public institutions but the private ones in terms of various grants, and in order to retain that public support one cannot just stand and crow about one's superiority. One has to develop alliances. One needs organization. The superior professor can't just walk around the streets shouting give me, give me, to a world where millions are unemployed, millions are suffering from discrimination, millions have insecurities.

"If the professor wants that public to understand why they should pay a portion of their taxes, why they should live a slightly poorer life at home in order to support the professor who wants reduced student contact hours, he can't do it by shouting his superiority and his elitism. He does it by belonging to groups that others belong to and sitting next to them and saying to them, 'Listen, I'm a worker just as you are and this is my work and to do it well, I need the following conditions.'



"And I submit that this is a period of time when it would be very good for the general public to believe that, indeed, professors do work. Professors *should* make a good living because their work is demanding and hard. But the elitist attitude—the attitude of living in a different world from everybody else—is self-defeating in the society in which we live."

## ON THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE TEACHERS



"If you could have the 400,000 people in higher education give a little of their time in the two weeks before elections to use telephones you would have one of the most potent political forces in the country. Look at the maritime unions in this country, which together number perhaps 40,000, and look at the legislation they can move. Take a look at the grain embargo which resulted in negotiations with the Soviet Union, that's six million metric tons of wheat, one-third to go over in American bottoms. Now if a group of 40,000 workers in this country can exert that sort of influence, then I would say the professors of this country still have a long way to go and could be one of the most powerful political forces in the nation.

"The life and death of public higher education is political. It depends on what legislators do. It depends on the tax structure. It depends on public policy.

"Being part of a union movement which includes other workers whose sons and daughters are the consumers in this system is very important. The fact that unionized college people will be able to call upon the AFL-CIO for support means that instead of fighting alone for a lower tuition policy or for aid to higher education, you will be part of a much broader movement. Let a college professor say, 'We want universal access to higher education, and everybody will say, 'Of course you want it because you are interested in your own bread and butter.' But if you are part of a state AFL-CIO, you get the whole labor movement to support that same goal. Then it is not a self-interested point of view. The labor movement is supporting it as a matter of public policy because they want certain benefits for workers they represent.

"Your whole ability to maintain higher education, to maintain jobs for your colleagues and to be able to maintain the benefits from one political administration to another are very much dependent on unionization and collective bargaining."

**"The life and death of public higher education is political. It depends on what legislators do. It depends on the tax structure. It depends on public policy."**



## ON FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

"There is no question that in a certain small number of elite institutions and maybe a few others, there is a real governing structure in which the faculty has the collective power, and there's a real question as to why those institutions should unionize. If they do unionize, I predict that they will limit the areas of collective bargaining so as to preserve the collegiality and the powers which they have under their current governance.

"However, for the most part faculty senates have not had this power. Many have been defunct for a long period of time—they have had massive non-participation.

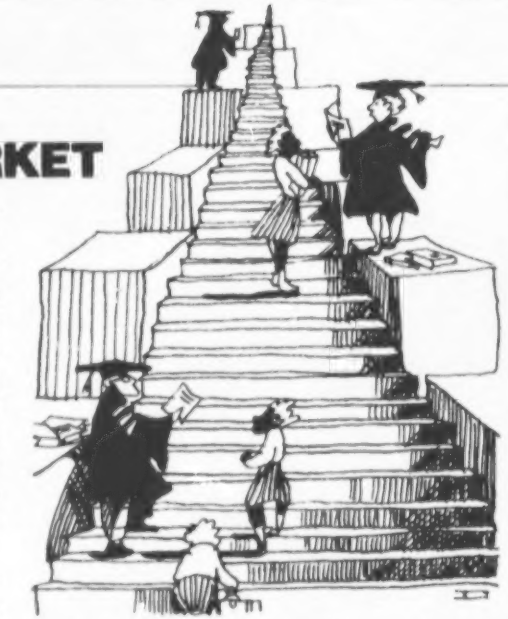
"In any case, the governance procedures that you have in higher education can continue to exist. There is no conflict with unionization. As a matter of fact, collective bargaining in most parts of the world is moving toward what is now referred to as worker-participation or co-determination. In every sector of this economy, I think we are going to see greater participation in the actual operation of the institutions."

**". . . collective bargaining in most parts of the world is moving toward what is now referred to as worker participation or co-determination."**

## ON DEFINING UNIVERSITY 'MANAGEMENT'

"Within the university structure, the question of who is on management's side and who is an employee is an empirical question. It is no different in principle from questions that have to be settled in other workplaces. In collective bargaining, there are impartial boards that have looked at these questions for many years. We don't always agree with their decisions, but they make them and ultimately someone decides who's on which side of the fence."

## ON THE SHRINKING ACADEMIC JOB MARKET



"I don't accept the notion that we have to have a shrinking system of either higher education or elementary and secondary education. I think that if you look at what we're doing in this country—maintaining 10 million people on unemployment insurance and welfare and food stamps and other transfer payments—you can see that it's a very expensive proposition, and the result is that unemployed people are bitter and sit at home looking at themselves in the mirror and wondering why the world is treating them that way.

"I think there's a better way to do things. I think that we should look once again at something similar to the GI Bill of Rights, only broader. I think we should press for a system of genuine lifelong learning opportunities, so that people could come back to school at any time—people who dropped out for whatever reason, people in mid-career, retired people who want to enrich their lives. If we had millions of people returning for more education, some of it for living a better life and some of it for making a better living, I don't think we would be paying very much more for these benefits than we now pay to have millions of people sitting home feeling miserable about themselves.

## ON TENURE UNDER ATTACK

'As to the tremendous number of young PhD's looking for work right now, I think it would be terrible if we started becoming cannibalistic and deciding who should be devoured to make room for someone else so that we can renew our institutions.

"I think the demands of university administrators for 'flexibility' in terms of getting rid of senior faculty are thoroughly outrageous.

"Let me go to an area that's far removed from colleges and universities—to the coal mines. I think we would all agree that a 17 or 18-year-old miner can dig a lot more coal than a 50 or 55 or 60-year-old miner. He's healthier, more vigorous. But you know, years ago we decided that as a matter of public policy, if you take the best from a person when he's vigorous, you've got to kind of average that out and you owe that person something later on. You just don't use a human being at that moment of greatest physical or intellectual vigor and then throw him out. I think that for some college and university people to be talking about this as a possibility shows that their morality is below that of the rest of society."



## ON 'PRODUCTIVITY' IN EDUCATION

"I think we should be very concerned with the fact that when there is talk about productivity in education, it generally means making life more difficult for the employees.

"Now that has not been the American tradition. Productivity in our society has generally come about through the simultaneous introduction of new technology and real improvements in the lives of the employees so that the employees have benefited and not been victimized by increased productivity.

"So I would say that if there is truly an interest in productivity and not just in increasing human misery for a certain number of people, we could accomplish it in ways which would not make the individual work longer or harder but which would provide an education for more people.

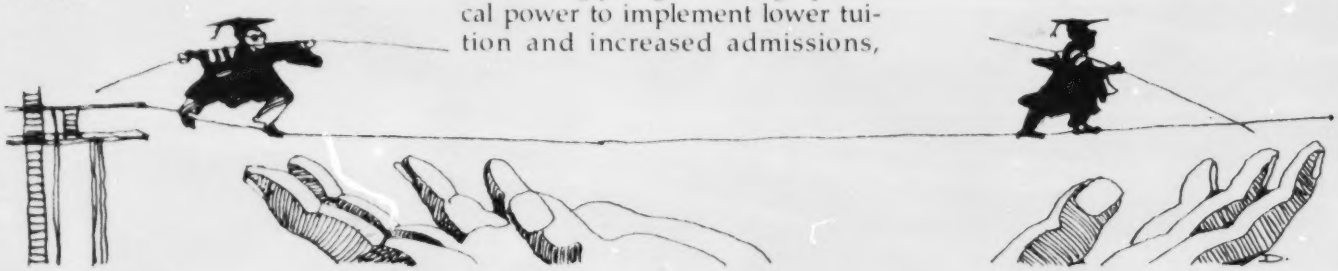
"And we have to ask ourselves something else. Suppose that tomorrow we could find a way of running all our institutions of higher learning with one hundred thousand professors instead of four hundred thousand. Have we really done something socially worthwhile to have 300,000 more unemployed people in the country collecting welfare and not paying taxes—have we really done something? If we had a society where there was an overall labor shortage and the mathematician or psychologist who teaches X number of hours could be doing other things to enrich the life of the country and other people, then there ought to be very, very great pressure to improve productivity techniques. But to improve the techniques of the university so that we can throw tens of thousands of people out of work—I don't see it."

## ON UNIONS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

"I think that there are two sides to this coin. I think those people who say unions are going to interfere with affirmative action are basically saying that because unionization will stress the job security of current jobholders and seniority provisions, that this necessarily means that the door is closed to new entrants and the new entrants are more likely to be minorities and women.

"Now if you take only that one side of it, then I say the critics are absolutely right. I don't know of any organization that favors firing people who are now on the job and performing satisfactorily in order to make room for new entrants, even though that may serve a very important, positive public purpose.

"But if you take the other side of this, namely that by organizing and unionizing you gain enough political power to implement lower tuition and increased admissions, then the existence of a union can be seen to promote real and lasting affirmative action without the bitterness of fighting over scarce jobs. I would say that the power to increase the money coming into higher education—thus expanding job opportunities—far outweighs the restrictions created by the union's necessary role of protecting those currently employed."



## ON THE ROLE OF COLLEGE MEMBERS IN THE AFT

"A very substantial part of the AFT's membership is made up of members in higher education—probably 60,000 out of a total of 475,000. It is the fastest-growing sector of the American Federation of Teachers, and we are devoting a major part of our efforts and energy to it.

"Each local has complete autonomy so that each determines its own policies. If you are engaged in collective bargaining, you determine yhat your own bargaining requirements are and you determine what the settlements are.

"Being in the AFT does mean, however, that you have certain services available to you. You have the services of the national organization in terms of lobbying. In Washington, we are working very closely with a coalition of higher education groups in order to maintain a high level of support for public higher education. We are leaders in a coalition to maintain low tuition.

"The AFL-CIO itself is a major lobbyist on Capitol Hill for aid to students and aid to higher education and for maintaining continuing education opportunities for people.

"The national organization also supplies bargaining expertise in local situations. If you want to do your own bargaining, you do it. If you want some help in bargaining, either people at the table with you or backup materials, then we provide it.

"I would say that what AFT locals want to do is their business. Our job is not to tell them what to do but to give support, and we give support both in terms of technical help and in terms of political power."

### ABOUT ALBERT SHANKER

Albert Shanker has been president of the AFT since 1974 and a vice-president of the AFL-CIO since 1973. He graduated from the New York City public schools and did his undergraduate work at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Shanker completed all required courses for a Ph.D. in philosophy at Columbia University where he held two assistantships under professor Charles Frankel. He ran out of money before completing his dissertation, however, and began teaching in the New York public schools in 1952. Recognizing the need for a strong teachers' union, Shanker worked as a volunteer for the New York Teachers Guild, AFT Local 2, until 1959 when he was employed full-time by the AFT to help bring about collective bargaining in New York City. In 1961, the United Federation of Teachers was elected exclusive bargaining agent for New York's 50,000 teachers. The UFT's first contract was negotiated and ratified the following year. Shanker became UFT president in 1964.